Ziegler Incident Mars Nixon Image

SAN CLEMENTE, Calif. (AP) — His efforts to launch a Watergate counteroffensive marred by a rare flash of public anger, President Nixon was described by aides Tuesday as pondering ways to speak out on vital issues facing the nation.

Outside a New Orleans convention hall Monday, an obviously irritated President gave press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler a hard shove with orders to straighten out confusion over which door the press should use.

The incident, filmed by network television camera crews, came after a reported assassination plot forced Nixon to cancel plans to ride in a motorcade through downtown New Orleans.

White House spokesmen would not explain Tuesday what specifically prompted Nixon's anger or say whether he had apologized to Ziegler.

"I can assure you that the presidential relationship is a good one," deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said when asked whether Nixon had apologized. "I don't think we need to add anything."

When reporters persisted with questions about the incident, Warren said, "Yesterday was a confused situation," and that the President observed that newsmen were preparing to use a convention hall door set aside for the official party. "The President reminded Ron of this," Warren said.

When asked whether the incident reflected any strain or pressure on the President, Warren said in reference to the reported assassination plot that "it was a highly unusual situation ... a difficult situation, a serious situation."

Then, in a clear reference to the impact of the Watergate

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scandal, Warren said there is "no question that the past few months have been periods of pressure on the President."

Warren also said Nixon is intent in "getting on with the essential business of the nation," citing such issues as the economy, foreign policy and energy. The President had sounded the same theme in his television address on Watergate last Wednesday.

The trip to New Orleans to address the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention was the first in a planned series of efforts to overcome the scandal's impact and rebuild sagging public confidence in the presidency.

A White House advance man had worked most of last week to arrange a public motorcade carrying Nixon through the heart of the downtown area but on Sunday, the President was informed of "a possible conspiracy" to assassinate him in the Louisiana city.

This prompted Nixon to accept a Secret Service recommendation that his plans to ride through downtown New Orleans be canceled and that his motorcade route be changed.

Warren refused Tuesday to give further details of the reported plot.

Other government sources also refused to divulge details, but one said the plot was the most serious threat ever to kill the President. He said Nixon was urged to cancel the entire New Orleans visit, but that the President personally turned down the recommendation and settled instead on a change in the motorcade plans.

A White House official said the conspiracy which most concerned the Secret Service did not involve a man being sought in New Mexico on charges of threatening Nixon's life.